The Mayan Empire--Uncovering the Mysteries of the

Peter Delagio

VISIT...

THE MAYAN EMPIRE

Uncovering the Mysteries of The Maya

(Forgotten Empires Series)

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1. Introduction to the Mayan People

There has always been a degree of fascination with ancient cultures, and the Mayan people are certainly no exception. As a matter of fact, much of the interest in the Mayan civilization is in the fact that it is steeped in so much mystery. These mysteries may, in some ways, hold the key to our own history and perhaps may even unlock some secrets that would be of interest to all people. We will review the history of the Mayan people, as well as some of their culture and the mysteries that their civilization may hold through the pages of this book.

Coming to Know the Mayan People

The first thing that we are going to do is review some of the

history of the Mayan people, as well as their practices. It is only by viewing the history of such an ancient culture that we are able to begin to grasp an understanding of who they were and what they stood for. This is where we will also begin to consider one of the deepest secrets of the Mayan civilization, its sudden end.

We also going to look at some of the technological advances that the Mayans had during their day. This includes their writings, which were quite extensive for the time and show a degree of skill in the written language that is often overlooked in their culture. In addition, their scientific advances are quite profound for the time, including their mathematics and their use of calendars.

Another mystery is going to begin to be unraveled when we discuss their interest in astronomy. Much of the Mayan culture centered on astronomy and how they perceived the heavenly bodies around them. You will marvel at how some of the temples and pyramids were actually designed to follow the study of the stars very carefully.

Life and Death in the Mayan Culture

It is of great interest to many people that the Mayan culture was involved in some rather unusual religious practices. In fact, much of their culture relied on their understanding of the supernatural, including many of the sacrifices that were given to their gods. The Mayan death rituals as well as human and animal sacrifices are always a mystery, as it shows a level of barbarity, even in a society that was quite advanced. We will review their religious practices, as well as their practice of sacrifice.

The Mayan culture was not always one that was hidden from view. Although they survived for centuries without being discovered by outsiders, eventually, men made their way across the sea and came in contact with the culture. We will discuss the conversion of the Mayan people, how it affected them and some of the issues that were associated with it.

Unraveling the Mysteries of the Mayans

In the final part of the book, we will begin to look at some of the specific mysteries that surround the Mayan culture. These are often misunderstood, but there may also be some deeper meanings to these mysteries that are overlooked.

Some people spend their lives looking into the mysteries that ancient cultures have to offer. If you are also interested in these types of mysteries, the Mayan people will certainly give you something to review. Regardless of whether you are talking about the mysteries of the pyramids, UFOs or even the rumored end of the world, there is much to discuss.

The Mayan culture may have dissipated to a large extent but it has left a significant imprint on history. For many centuries, they went

largely undiscovered except to those in the area but, even though they were isolated, they had some significant advancements that are worthy of note.

You will enjoy the review of the Mayan people and an introduction to some of the mysteries that they left behind for us. By studying these mysteries, we may not only learn something about their heritage and their past, we may also find that we are learning something about our own past as well.

2. History of the Mayan Empire

Although there is much mystery associated with the Mayan culture and their people, there is also a lot that is understood about it. Much study has been done about the culture in general, enough to help us understand a lot of the history that is associated with it. In this chapter, we are going to review some of the basic history of the Mayan Empire and how it developed throughout the centuries.

The area of Mesoamerica, which is where the Mayan culture developed, has an interesting history. It can actually be broken into 3 different sections, which allow you to see how the Mayan culture developed and why it may have developed in the way that it did.

Archaic Period (Up to 2000 BCE) - During this ancient time in Mesoamerica, individuals arrived to occupy the area as hunter-gatherers. As a group, they also began to develop agricultural skills and had domesticated animals, such as turkeys and dogs. Some of the crops that this ancient culture cultivated included corn, various vegetables and beans. Those crops continued to be an important part of the Mayan culture throughout their history.

During the archaic period, various villages began to be established.

Along with those villages were temples and religious sites, many of which may have been incorporated into the ancient Mayan culture as we knew it. There is excavation of this time period that date back to the end of the archaic period.

Classic Period (~200 - 900 CE) - It was during the classical period that cities began to be developed in the area. This included the city of Teotihuacan, which was located in the basin of Mexico. It was just south of what is today known as Mexico City and it continued to thrive is a city for many centuries.

There were many other cities and areas of interest that were built during this time and they continue to be a source of interest to archaeologists and those that visit the area. For some unknown reason, which we will discuss in the following chapter, the city of Teotihuacan was abandoned in approximately 900 CE suddenly and for what appears to be no apparent reason.

It was also during this time that many other cities began to be formed in the area and the ancient culture of the Mayan people was formed along with it. The religious influences of that time, along with their study of the stars and interest in various scientific practices made them stand out among ancient cultures of the day. During this height of Mayan civilization, they came up with the calendar that was of interest to many people just a few short years ago. All of these cities, along with the culture in general dissipated at the end of this time frame, although the culture and people still exist in the area.

Post-classic Period (900 - 1500 AD) - With the ancient Mayan civilization greatly reduced and the cities abandoned to a large extent, a new tribe began to take control of the region. This tribe, known as the Toltecs, took over many of the cities that were established by the Mayan culture. This is a part of the history that is familiar to many people, because it includes the time of the Spanish conquest. There were still many Mayans that lived in the area, however, although the Spaniards that invaded the land were unaware of the fact that they were responsible for the construction of the cities. In the year 1524, the ancient Mayan civilization officially came to its end with the conquest of the Quiche Maya.

3. What Happened to the Mayan Empire?

Prior to the year 800 CE, the Mayan Empire was a very powerful part of the Mesoamerica region. Cities were formed over the previous centuries and they were not only inhabited, civilization seemed to thrive in the area during that time. This included a population that was quite extensive for the civilization and the area where it resided. For some unknown reason, however, the Mayan civilization suddenly came to its end and it did so in a very short amount of time.

The time in which the Mayan civilization crumbled and fell is not left to the imagination. They were steeped in the development of calendars and were very accurate in their keeping of dates. In the ninth century, there was still a thriving culture in the area, although the glyphs of the time suddenly stopped, which indicates that the civilization came to an end at that time as well.

The end of the Mayan civilization has been of interest to many individuals, as it seems to be without precedent and there is no real way to determine why it occurred. Some people look to this mystery

because of the fact that it seemingly can't be solved but other people may look at it because they are fearful that it may happen to us as a culture again.

Although it cannot be said with any degree of certainty why the Mayan culture disappeared so suddenly, there are some theories that may lead to a logical explanation. Here are some of the more common theories that have gained ground in recent years.

War - At one time, the Mayan culture was considered to be a very peaceful people but in reality, they were warlike and often fought with neighboring tribes, as well as fighting among themselves. It was not uncommon for neighboring cities within the Mayan Empire to fight against each other, invade each other and even to destroy the culture of the city. It is quite possible that a war, along with all of the issues that go along with it could have led to the downfall of the Mayan Empire. If a great war would have occurred during the time, it certainly could have had that effect.

Cataclysm - Another theory, which has lost a lot of its merit, is the possibility that the Mayans ceased to exist as a civilization because of some cataclysmic event. There is no evidence of such an event, which could have included volcanic eruptions or earthquakes but those types of issues could certainly lead to the downfall of a civilization. The reason why the cataclysm theory is greatly discarded is because the dissipation of the Mayan Empire did not occur suddenly. In fact, there were some cities that continued to remain for up to 200 years, once the decline began.

Famine - As we reviewed in the history of the Mayan people, the area not only took advantage of hunting and gathering, they also began to develop extensive architectural techniques. This included techniques that are largely hard on the environment, such as slash and burn and the draining of wetlands for irrigation. As the civilization continued to grow, there may have been a greater need for the development of agriculture, and it may have outpaced the ability to grow food for the civilization. If a famine occurred, it could have easily caused the civilization of the area to dissipate and leave the cities in order to find food.

Environment - Most of us are familiar with environmental issues, as they are widely talked about on the news today. The fact of the matter is, however, environmental change is nothing new and it has occurred many times over the course of human history. The environmental change may not have been felt in other parts of the world, but if a flood, drought or any severe change affected the area of Mesoamerica, it could easily have caused the Mayan people to leave their cities. Environmental change carries many problems along with it, including the possibility for famine, disease and even an increased

risk for warfare.

Inner fighting - Like today, the population in many of the major Mayan cities was outpacing its ability to keep up with the load. When this takes place, it is not unusual for civil problems to occur and for fighting to take place among the residents. This is especially the case if there was not enough food available or if there were issues associated with the government of the time. The Mayan Empire could well have fallen due to the fact that they were a victim of their own strife and fighting among the residents of individual cities.

These are only a few of the possible explanations as to why the Mayan Empire may have fallen so suddenly and so severely. What is known, however, is that the cities were abandoned and for some reason or another, it happened in a relatively short amount of time.

Some individuals look to a different reason that may be beyond the scope of what is typically seen within any known civilization. After all, the Mayan people were quite advanced and there are some individuals who believe that they were in regular contact with aliens from another world. Although this may be far-fetched, there are those that believe that it had a direct connection with the downfall of the Mayan Empire.

It may also be that they simply fell due to their own barbarity. The Mayan people were violent as a group, not only going to war as was discussed but also in various forms of human torture and sacrifice for religious purposes. These can easily cause difficulties that would lead to the downfall of the civilization if they were ongoing and the common people stood up against it.

Quite simply, there is no clear reason why the Mayan Empire came to an end. There is plenty of speculation, however, and with a little bit of research, you may uncover some additional speculation that is more to your liking. For now, it will continue to remain a mystery but it is one that will also continue to be studied until a satisfactory answer is found.

4. Advanced Use of Mathematics and Calendars

The Mayan civilization is known to be quite advanced, but many people look beyond some of the specific advancements that they made during the time. In this chapter, we are going to review 2 of the ways that the Mayan culture was advanced and how it was quite significant, compared to the other cultures of the surrounding area. Looking at this information can easily show us how they were able to accomplish what they did during the amount of time that they existed as a civilization.

The Mayan Use of Mathematics

In our common understanding of mathematics, there are 10 digits that represent a large number of numbers. This is the mathematical system that we are most familiar with and it is one that most of us consider to be the same that is used among many cultures. The Mayan people, however, were able to utilize a much simpler numerical system but were still able to incorporate large numbers into their use of mathematics as well. This system made the use of only three symbols, including a bar, a dot and another symbol (such as a shell),

which stood for zero or the completion of the number.

There were similarities to the way that they used mathematics and we use mathematics today. Like us, they used what are known as place values. In our mathematical system, a place value would be a digit that is separating the whole number from decimals or could be a comma, which separates three digits when dealing with very large numbers. The use of these values in Mayan mathematics greatly extended their abilities to deal with large numbers.

There were also some differences in the way that the Mayan culture used mathematics. One of the differences is that they used what is known as a base 20. In essence, this means that the number that is second in line would have a value of 20, rather than having a value of 10, as is the case in our own mathematical system. Another difference is that the place values were arranged in a vertical manner, rather than being arranged horizontally.

The fact that the Mayans were advanced in mathematics at this time may seem rather insignificant, but it is actually quite important to understand. They were a very ancient culture, and during the same time, individuals who were considered to be very advanced in Europe were still using the Roman numeral system, which was quite archaic. In addition, the fact that the Mayan culture could take part in significant mathematical equations helped to advance their ability to develop calendars and to study the movement of the stars and planets, which they did with great precision.

The Development of the Mayan Calendar

Another, significant achievement of the Mayan culture is their use of a calendar system. This is something that many of us are familiar with at this time, because there was talk of the "end of the world", due to the Mayan calendar supposedly running out in 2012. That is something that will be discussed in a further chapter of this book, but in this chapter, we are going to discuss the development of the Mayan calendar and how significant it was for its day.

Although many people consider the Mayan calendar to be a single unit, the fact of the matter is, there was an entire system of Mayan calendars, which is how they consider the passing of time, as well as keeping track of when they should plant seeds, offer sacrifices and celebrate their holidays.

It is interesting to note that the series of Mayan calendars, some of which are still loosely used to this day, were not an original development of the Mayan civilization. What they did do, however, is to put their own spin on those calendars and to improve them in many ways.

The basic Mayan calendar involves a number of different cycles, each of which represent a certain amount of time. The Tzolkin was a

calendar with the 260 day time period and it was combined with a calendar that had 365 days in order to form the Haab'. The cycle of the Haab' would continue 52 times and this was make up what is known as the calendar round. It is interesting to note that there are groups still in existence in the Guatemalan highlands that use the calendar round.

An additional calendar was used that is known as the long count, and it had the purpose of identifying events and how they corresponded with each other. This calendar is based mainly on mythological background, and it has a starting date that is the equivalent to August 11, 3114 B.C.E. (Gregorian calendar) or September 6 of the same year (Julian calendar). As is the case with many calendars of that day, it corresponded with the lunar phase and the rising of Venus as the morning or evening star.

These calendars were used for a variety of purposes, including for astrological means. It is also quite possible that these calendars were used as a way to time warfare according to astrological markings as well. Additional cycles were also counted according to the Mayan artifacts that are available, although there is less information to support the specifics of those calendars.

The Mayans paid close attention to the passage of time and they often celebrated calendar cycles with the erection of monuments, such as pyramids. The pyramids found in Yaxha and Tikal are examples of this fact. They also use the calendars to determine their own mythological religious backing, which included other worlds that existed before the current world with humans.

The cycle of Mayan calendars was relatively short-lived. The calendar round would last for 52 years, which was equal to 18,980 days. It would be impossible to use this form of dating to record history accurately, so they often used the Long Count calendar when recording information that may have lasted more than a lifetime. Of course, the Mayans were not well known for accurately recording history and in many cases, a spin was put on it to make it possible for the common people to view Kings as Gods.

The Mayan calendar is also something that recently came into public view. It was thought, at the time, that the dates on the Mayan calendar would end on December 21, 2012. This raised a considerable amount of speculation that the end of the world could occur on that day. Of course, we have passed that date considerably, but there is still some speculation that the cycles known by the Mayans may have something to do with the ultimate passing of time as well. This information is for the reviewed in chapter 11 of this book.

5. Early Experts in Astronomy

As a culture, the Mayan civilization had high regard for the sky and everything contained within it. As such, they were known for being astronomers and they were considerably advanced for their time. Although they did not have a full understanding of everything that they saw within the heavens, it is interesting to note that they had interpretations that were often more advanced than other civilizations of the day.

According to Mayan beliefs, they thought that the earth was immovable, fixed and the center of the universe. They also looked to the heavenly bodies, such as the planets, stars, moon and sun as being gods and as they continued to move across the sky, rising and setting throughout the day and night, it was thought that those gods were traveling to the earth and to the underworld, back and forth from their heavenly position. They had high regard for these mythological gods and they felt as if they were intimately interested in human affairs.

The Importance of Celestial Phenomena

Since the Mayans studied the heavens diligently, they also considered any movements in the stars, Moon or Sun to be an indicator of an event that would likewise take place on earth. According to their astrological viewings, they may start a war or perhaps institute a new King or, if things weren't aligned properly, they might avoid them. Although anything having to do with astronomy and astrology were important to the Mayans, there were certain heavenly bodies that were more important.

The Mayan Sun God (Kinich Ahau) - The Sun was viewed with great respect as one of the gods responsible for creation. It was thought that the sun would remain in the sky all day but at nighttime, it would become a Jaguar and pass through the underworld. Many of the Mayan kings were revered as gods and some of those kings claimed to be a descendent of Kinich Ahau. As a result of watching the sun so closely, they were able to predict the timing of the equinox accurately, as well as when any eclipses would occur.

Planets - The movements of the visible planets, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn were tracked very closely by the Mayan civilization. They considered their movements to be significant and in some cases, it would involve the beginning of a war or perhaps even sacrifices, which could include human sacrifices. Although the Mayans revered all of the planets, Venus was considered to be the most important. It is interesting to note that their understanding of the length of a year on Venus in relation to the earth was very accurate.

The Moon - Although the sun was the most important god in the sky for the Mayans, the moon was a close second. Just as there were certain Mayan kings who claimed to be descendants of the sun, there were also those who claimed to be descendent of the moon goddess, Ix Chel. It was theorized, according to Mayan mythology, that the sun goddess would battle with the sun every day when they were in the sky and was responsible for the sun god returning to the underworld has a Jaguar every night. The moon was considered to be very important to both fertility and childbirth.

Stars - The stars were of interest to the Mayan civilization, but not as much as the other heavenly bodies because they remained in their position relative to each other. The Mayans used the stars for predicting the time of year, including when it was time to plant and when the Central American rains would occur. The sun, moon and planets were steeped in mythology, as were the stars but the stars provided a more practical way for the Mayans to discern the passing of time.

Astronomy and Mayan Architecture

The worship and study of the sun, moon, planets and stars was so

important to the Mayans that they considered it when erecting any significant buildings, such as pyramids and temples. In many cases, the buildings would align with heavenly bodies and the openings in those architectural designs would allow an individual to tell the passing of time because of certain heavenly bodies being visible through them. According to the visibility of those heavenly bodies, as well as how the inside of the building may be illuminated, it could correspond with various celebrations and sacrifices for the Mayan people.

6. Ancient Mayan Writings

The Mayan civilization was quite advanced in a number of different ways. One of the ways that this can be seen is in the writings, sometimes known as the Mayan codices that are still in existence today. These books, which were written on tree bark or certain types of natural paper, were actually folding books and they were written in Mayan hieroglyphics that were quite advanced.

At one point, the Mayan language was considered to be somewhat simplistic and the written language was not thought of as being all that advanced. As more was learned about the Mayan civilization, however, it was discovered that the hieroglyphics and other forms of writing that they used were advanced and it demonstrated the advancement of the civilization as a whole.

It is interesting to note that the Mayans developed the ability to make a folding book in and around the fifth century, which is similar to the time in which the Romans were using these types of books. Unlike the Romans, however, they used types of paper that proved to be more durable so it has stood the test time and there are still some of these codices in existence today.

Out of the Mayan writings that have survived since those ancient times, the Dresden codex is perhaps one of the most significant. Much of the information that we have about the Mayan culture relies on these books. This codex, along with many of the other writings that are available from the Mayan civilization is largely astrological and has to do with the movement of the heavenly bodies, including the cycles of Venus and solar eclipses.

According to the writings of the Dresden Codex, the cycle of the planet Venus was very important to the religion of the day. As was discussed previously, the Mayan culture was able to accurately identify the cycles of Venus with precise accuracy and their perception of a year on the planet was within a matter of minutes of the actual year. Since the planet Venus was thought to be a god of war, the phases of Venus were often used to determine when wars would begin.

Paris Codex - This is another codex, which was well preserved, and it contains many prophecies that were held by the Mayans. Although the original of this book has been lost, there are drawings that are thought to be accurate which still survive as copies. Information about the Mayan zodiac is also contained in this codex.

Madrid Codex - Although all of the Mayan writings that have survived to this day are quite old, the Madrid Codex is thought to be one of the oldest. It contains information about horoscopes that were used by Mayan priests and almanacs, which help to identify the seasons of the year. Like many of the other writings of the Mayan civilization, the Madrid Codex contains information about astronomical movements. It is thought that the information in this codex was used by priests of the Mayan people to determine when various ceremonies and rituals would take place.

Grolier Codex - This is one of the newer writings to be discovered and it is somewhat limited in the information that is available on this writing. There are fragments of some 11 pages and, although it is not on public display, it can be viewed on the Internet. Each of the 11 pages is unique, but all of them contain a picture of a god, a number and what is thought to be dates. It is of interest that all of the gods are looking to the left.

7. Ancient Mayan Religious Practices

Like many ancient cultures, the Mayan civilization was deeply rooted in the religion of the day. As for the Mayans, they tended to have their own form of mythology that involved a number of gods, including those represented by the heavenly bodies and many associated with nature on earth, such as the maize god. They were very meticulous about the way that they worshiped these gods and they had temples and buildings that were established in order to worship them and to take part in various rituals.

The primary way that temples were built by the Mayan civilization was in the form of a pyramid. It is interesting to note, although they

were separated by many millions of miles, that the pyramids were also used by the ancient Egyptians for religious reasons as well. Of course, there was some form of difference in the shape of the pyramids, with the Egyptians coming to a point on top and the Mayans being more flat on the top. These pyramids can be found throughout a number of Mayan cities and many of them are still in existence today.

The pyramids were separated into two different types. One of the pyramids could be climbed and this is perhaps the one that is familiar to most people, as you often see pictures of Mayan pyramids with long staircases. It is interesting to note that the pyramids that were built in order to be climbed were the ones that were utilized for human sacrifices.

The other pyramids that were built were sacred to the Mayan civilization and, although they were built with stairs included, they were often too steep for an average person to climb them. These temples were often not even to be approached or touched. There were times when these types of pyramids would be used, however, and the priest would utilize the staircase, however treacherous, in an attempt to get closer to the heavenly gods.

The Belief in the Human Soul

According to the Mayan religion, the human soul lived on after death but it was to be eternally sentenced to the underworld. This is not only true of the common people; it was also true of royalty as well. The only way that somebody could avoid an afterlife in the underworld is by being sacrificed or if a child would die during childbirth. The underworld was thought to be an evil place, full of gods that are represented by Jaguars. It is interesting to note that it is thought that the sun god also became a Jaguar at night, as the sun set and it returned to the underworld.

An additional belief in the Mayan people is that each individual person had an animal to which they were connected. If you were a king, your companion spirit would be a Jaguar but if you were a common person, it could be any type of animal. The Mayan religion taught that you could transform into your animal counterpart.

The Mayans worshiped more than 165 different gods. These gods were not eternal, however, they had a limited lifespan and eventually, they would die. It is also possible for these gods to take part in various activities, which could include agriculture, warfare and business activities.

The Mayans did use a form of prayer but in most cases, it was directly associated with a sacrifice that was taking place. These were specific prayers that made mention of the gods, as well as events that may have taken place in Mayan mythology.

In the following chapter, we will discuss some of the more

interesting aspects of the Mayan religion, including the human and animal sacrifices, which took part on a regular basis. It can help to give us additional insight into the Mayan civilization and their belief structure.

8. Mayan Sacrifices – Facts and Meanings

A large part of the Mayan religious practices involved either bloodletting or sacrifice. It was thought, at one time, that only a few of the Mayan cities took part in this type of practice but as more information has come to light in recent years due to archaeology, it was found that many of them were deeply steeped in the practice of human sacrifice. In this chapter, we are going to talk about some of the Mayan sacrifices and why they may have taken part in this type of practice.

The Practice of Bloodletting

One of the types of religious practices that were done on a regular basis was bloodletting. This type of practice occurred according to various festivities and rituals with the Mayan culture and it involved cutting part of the body in order to release blood. Bloodletting was done to appease the gods but it was also used with enemas and smoking tobacco in order to put an individual in a trance. It was thought that, due to the bloodletting and other practices, the priest

would be able to talk to their ancestors and to gods that lived in the underworld.

In most cases, bloodletting was part of a ritualistic event that occurred on a specific date. These dates were meticulously kept on the Mayan calendars. The rituals may also be associated with various events that were occurring, such as the ascension of the King to the throne or with significant life events of royalty, such as marriages and birth.

There were rooms near the tops of the pyramids were bloodletting ceremonies occurred, but it was also a public festival. It is thought that many Mayans would gather at the base of the pyramid to watch the spectacle. It is interesting to note that throughout history, these types of activities have often attracted a crowd. Even in the past century, public hangings or floggings would be attended by many in the area.

Bloodletting may be done by any number of different tools, including bones that were carved sharply, spines of a stingray and knotted ropes. The blood would often be allowed to run onto a piece of bark paper and then the paper would be burned in order to allow the blood to ascend to the gods. It was thought that it was a way of giving the gods energy. Various parts of the body may be cut for this purpose and at times, the priest would even cut his own penis or tongue during the ceremonies.

There are many depictions of these bloodletting rituals that are still in existence today at various monuments from those ancient times. It can help us to have a view into those earlier times and the religious practices that existed.

The Mayan Empire and Human Sacrifices

Another aspect of the Mayan religious practices are the human sacrifices that took place on a regular basis. The individuals who were sacrificed by the Mayans could be captured enemies from warfare or the Mayan people themselves. The Mayan culture was also deeply involved in various sports and it could be that the loser from the sporting event could be sacrificed as well.

One common way that human sacrifice took place is for the human to be held down and for the heart to be cut out quickly so that it was still beating outside of the body. This is perhaps the type of human sacrifice that many of us are familiar with because of its depiction in the movies. More often than not, however, the Mayans would use other methods of human sacrifice, such as decapitating the individual or disemboweling them. There were also times when they would simply tie the victim and push them down the stairs from the top of the Temple.

The method that was used for human sacrifice was typically

associated with the individual that was being sacrifice. For example, an individual who was a loser at one of the games could be pushed down the Temple stairs or maybe decapitated. If it were a prisoner of war however, they would likely be disemboweled.

Why Did Human Sacrifice Occur?

The Mayan Empire likely sacrificed humans for the same reason that many ancient cultures took part in this practice. It was deeply rooted in their religious practices and the thought of rebirth and creation was sacred to them. In the Mayan culture, anybody who was sacrificed in a ritualistic manner did not have to spend eternity in the underworld. Rather, they would be able to live in the world that was above.

It is also noteworthy that human sacrifices often took place during a state event, such as when a king rose to the throne. It was also associated with various events on the calendar, such as the start of a new cycle. That is another reason why it is thought that the human sacrifices practice by the Mayan civilization had to do with rebirth.

Another reason why the Mayan culture practiced human sacrifice was in association with a ballgame. This was no simple sport, and often had a spiritual connotation and at times, it was thought that the ball even contained decapitated heads or could even be a skull. It could be that warrior enemies who were captured during war could be forced to take part in this game and afterword, they would be disemboweled or beheaded.

Unfortunately, the Mayan culture also took part in child sacrifice. This was often known, but additional evidence has been found to back the notion that this type of sacrifice took place regularly. A cave was found in Comalcalco in 2005, which contained the graves of very young children who were sacrificed in that area. This was likely in association with the dedication of new temples. This type of barbarism was not unique to the Mayan culture, however, and there were many cultures throughout the world that also took part in this practice.

9. Mayan Death Rituals

Many cultures, including those of the modern time, place great importance on the death of an individual. This was also true of the Mayan culture, which had a great respect for death and thought that it was a time in which the individual who had died should be commemorated. This is often done in a ritualistic way and they had various ceremonies that surrounded the death of an individual. It was thought to give them a proper sendoff, as well as to help them find their way to the underworld.

The Mayan culture was one that had a great respect for death and those who had died. They grieved the dead, as many do today but they took it quite a bit further with some of the customs and rituals that were associated with death. There were also beliefs that were associated with death that would take place when a person died, depending upon why they died.

It was believed that every person who died would spend eternity in the underworld. There were very few ways for you to get out of this, but if you died during childbirth or if you were a sacrificial victim, you would go to heaven rather than the underworld. It was also

thought that individuals who committed suicide or who died in battle during a war would also be able to go to heaven rather than to the underworld.

In the ancient Mayan civilization, the thought of death may have been much different than it was in the later years. According to certain drawings, which are still in existence, it may have been thought that the dead were reborn on the earth in a different form. One of the drawings that depict this shows a Mayan King that was sprouting, as if they were growing from the earth.

The Mayans were also steeped in ancestor worship and they considered it a very important part of their religious practices. This is also something that was true of many religions during ancient times and there are still religions today that actively take part in ancestor worship. Idols, which were worshiped during that time, may have contained the ashes of dead loved ones and various sacrifices, including food, could have been offered to those idols on various days throughout the year.

A Further Look at Mayan Death Rituals

It is interesting to note that the maize was one of the most important agricultural crops during the Mayan Empire. As a result, it was thought that it could be used as food for an individual who had died while they were on their way to the afterlife. As a result, when a Mayan died, maize was put into their mouth. They may also have other objects placed into the mouth, such as a bead or a jade, which could be used as a form of money while they were on their way to the afterlife as well.

The Mayan culture had many rituals that were associated with their religious practices. The death rituals were only one of those that could be studied. Like many of the other ritualistic practices, those that are associated with death and dying continued to change over the course of Mayan history. It is worthy of study, as it can help us to understand where our thoughts of death may originate.

10. Predictions of the Mayan Calendar

The Mayan calendars were very sophisticated for their day. Although they did not develop the calendar originally, they did make significant improvements to it and these included adding in some of their knowledge of astronomical phenomena and their use of mathematics, which was quite extensive as well. There were also specific numbers that were important to the Mayan civilization, including the numbers 13 and 20.

20 was an important number because there are 20 toes and fingers on the human body. It is also noteworthy that the number 20 was used in mathematical figures in Mayan culture, much the same as the number 10 and factors of 10 are used in our own numerical system. The number 13 was important because of the number of joints in the human body, which adds up to 13.

Because of the fact that they considered the numbers 13 and 20 to be significant, the calendar was based on those numbers to a large

extent. One of the primary calendars, which were the first in existence with the Mayans, was 260 days long, which is 20 months of 13 days. This ended up being an important calendar for the Mayan civilization because it helped keep track of many of the ceremonial aspects and their religious practices. It was also used for astrological reasons to determine the outcome of an individual when they were born.

The original calendar did not contain enough information because it lacked the ability to count for an entire calendar year. For that purpose, they developed another calendar that was known as the Haab and a combination of the original calendar and the Haab came together in the Calendar Round. This consisted of a period of 52 years, more or less, but it still did not give the Mayans enough room to calculate very long amounts time, which is why the Long Count calendar was formed.

The Long Count calendar contains a much longer span of time and it covers over 5125 years. This amount of time is referred to in the Mayan culture is the great cycle, with each cycle being made of five units. Those five units contain one day, 20 days, 360 days, 7200 days and 144,000 days collectively. When the five units continue to accumulate for a total of 13 times, you would start again at the beginning of the cycle.

What is interesting to note is the fact that there was an end to this calendar, which caused quite a bit of stir back in 2012. According to the Long Count calendar, the end date would be 13.0.0.0.0, which is the equivalent of December 21, 2012.

Many people look to the end of the Long Count calendar as being an end to everything, as if it had an apocalyptic meaning attached to it. They felt as if the fact that the calendar was ending would point to the fact that time was ending and that we would enter into a new cycle, in which the old would be destroyed and the new would began. Is this really the way that it should be considered?

First of all, it's obvious that the end of the world did not occur on December 21, 2012. In fact, we are still alive and kicking years after that date occurred. For that reason alone, it's important to understand that the predictions that people associate with the Mayan calendars are not always going to come true. That doesn't mean, however, that there was no significance that was associated with that date.

If the ancient Mayan civilization were still in existence today, they would have considered the date of 13.0.0.0.0 to be very significant. In line with the fact that they celebrated the beginning of any cycle, regardless of whether it is large or small, would show that they would also place a significant amount of weight on that day. It would be a time of great celebration and more than likely, there would be ritualistic practices associated with that day, including human

sacrifice, ritualistic games and bloodletting.

Where Did the Misconception Come from?

It is interesting to note that, although many people have the misconception that the world was coming to an end in December 2012, it really does not have any basis in Mayan belief. What happened, however, is that a planet, which was supposedly a Samaritan discovery, was headed for Earth and would cause a cataclysmic end in May 2003. Of course, that doomsday date did not pan out but it was conveniently moved ahead till December 2012. When people started to make the connection between the impact of Nibiru, which does not exist, and the end of the Mayan calendar and the prediction of doomsday thanks to the Mayan Long Count calendar was born.

There were even new factors that were added into the mix as the date began to approach. For example, there was a notion that the sky would go dark for three days before December 21 occurred. There's no real logic to this theory and nobody really knows where it got its start, but it did gain some momentum until it obviously did not occur.

Will the World Continue?

There have always been notions of doomsday and various doomsday deadlines have been set throughout the eons, all of which seem to fall quiet. That is due to the fact that those previous predictions are not based on any sound judgment or fact, which would include the belief that the Mayan calendar ending had anything to do with the end of time.

In reality, the Mayans did not believe that time is going to end on that date and this was further recognized when additional information came to light. The ancient Long Count calendar did have an end, which was on the date of December 21, 2012. There were additional numbers that were found painted in one of the Mayan complexes in Guatemala that actually showed that the end of time extended much further than what was included on the Long Count calendar. According to the numbers that were included in that complex, the known world and the calendar would exist for at least another 7000 years.

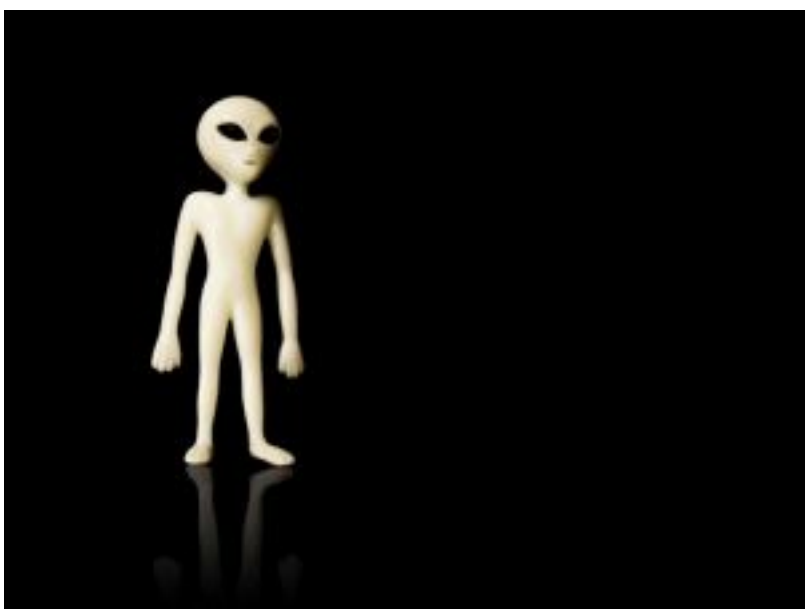
There have been rumors that the Mayan calendars made many predictions, some of which have come true. The fact of the matter is, however, the December 21, 2012 is the only real prediction of significance for our day and it is one that is not of Mayan origin.

The Mayan calendars were used for recording the passing of time, for astrological reasons and to determine when it was time to perform various ritualistic practices. They had a very complex way of coming up with these calendars, which allowed them to record the span of time that was much longer than a human lifespan. As a result, it is still

somewhat of a mystery, because they were such an advanced culture and were able to take part in these complex mathematical procedures. As far as their predictions, however, they did not exist.

11. Mayan UFOs – Ancient Astronauts?

As a society, we have always been fascinated with the possibility that there is intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. It is, at times, difficult to imagine that we are alone in the universe and that no other humanoid life forms exist which are able to communicate with us intelligently. As a result, there has been much consideration of whether UFOs visited the ancient Mayans and if they were aware of the existence of alien beings.



In this chapter, we are going to discuss the possibility that there is intelligent life elsewhere in the universe and, at some time, they may have come to the earth and visited the Mayan civilization. We will take a look at some of the evidence that may point to this possibility, as well as some other theories, which can lead to the formation of the same evidence as well.

Why believe in the Mayan UFO connection?

First of all, there is some information to point to the possibility that ancient Mayan artifacts may depict aliens, as well as UFOs. It has

never been fully proven that these artifacts exist and that they are not hoaxes but some reports state that the Mexican government was holding onto these items until they recently released them and that additional items were found in an interior room of a Mayan pyramid.

If you look at the pictures of these Mayan UFO artifacts, it certainly can be rather convincing. Some of the artifacts depict disc shaped objects that are hovering in the sky, transporting things up and down and others showed humanoid life forms in what appear to be spacesuits. An interesting factor of some of these Mayan artifacts that may depict alien life forms is that the eyes are very similar to the alien life forms that are often depicted in more recent times.

Of course, as could be expected, there are also a lot of false Mayan UFO artifacts, which were created in order to make it seem as if alien life existed. If you were to look at these alone, you would obviously doubt the fact that the Mayans were visited by aliens, simply because of the background of the falsified artifacts. There are real artifacts, however, which also depict the same sort of scenes, although the scenes that are shown in them are not as vibrant when displaying UFOs. Those UFOs can be seen in them, however, and there is no denying that it is a possibility that the Mayans were trying to show this through the drawings.

The Ancient Astronaut Theory

There has been speculation that the ancient Mayan Empire was visited by people from other planets. Although the information that is associated with this theory may differ from one tale to another, there are many people who speculate that it may have been an alien who was responsible for teaching the ancient Mayans about mathematics, astronomy, medicine and agriculture.

It is interesting to note that the advancements of the Mayan culture were significant in comparison with other cultures, even in the developed world during the day. For example, the astronomical calendars that were used by the Mayans were able to predict lunar eclipses and other astronomical events with precision, even by today's standards. Even in the fact that the Mayans were able to determine the yearly cycle of Venus is nothing short of amazing. The Mayans were aware of planets that were not discovered until centuries later as well.

Of course, the ancient astronaut theory does not only limit itself to the Mayans but it also states that the entire civilization of Earth may be due to visits from aliens that seeded the planet thousands of years ago. It is nothing more than a hypothesis, however, and one does not have any basis in fact.

Were the Ancient Mayans Capable of Flight?

Much of the artifacts and information about the ancient Mayan civilization was destroyed during the Spanish conquest of the Yucatán.

Unfortunately, a lot of the information that could be used today to determine the facts about the Mayan Empire was destroyed along with it. This would include many of their technological advances, which may be far greater than what we had even considered.

One of the possibilities as to how the Mayans were aware of the possibility of flight is the good possibility that they were able to take part in flight. It has been theorized that many ancient civilizations around the world were able to take to the sky. There are artifacts to show this is possible, including drawings of ancient flying machines that were found in an Egyptian tomb. Although the Mayans may not have been able to achieve spaceflight, it is possible that they theorized about it, much as we do today. The drawings that were found that seem to depict UFOs and aliens could merely be the theories of an ancient culture. Of course that, in itself, is a theory as well.

12. Hidden Secrets of the Mayan Pyramids

The Mayan Empire once sprawled over many miles and contained a vast number of cities that were interconnected in culture, religion and had a common people. They also had something else in common, their use of the pyramid in architecture. In fact, one of the most notable features that remains from those ancient cities are the pyramids that dot the landscape and can be seen protruding from the top of the jungle from great distances.

Like many cultures, the ancient Mayans considered the pyramid to be sacred. It is interesting to note that this type of building is used in many parts of the world that were quite disconnected. For example, the ancient Egyptians used pyramids, even though they were separated by thousands of miles and an ocean from the Mayan Empire. Of course, the Egyptians used pyramids that came to a point on top where the Mayans used pyramids that were flat on top, which allowed them to hold ritual sacrifices and other ceremonies in the area.

Another notable feature of the Mayan pyramids are the staircases that often lead from ground level to the very top. Some of the staircases were used in religious ceremonies and the priest would climb the staircase in order to be closer to God before any bloodletting or human sacrifices were done. The stairs even served as a means of sacrifice, as many of the sacrificial victims were simply tied and throw down the steps to their death.

Some of the Mayan pyramids could be approached freely and they were regularly used in ritualistic practices. Other pyramids, however, were very sacred to the Mayan people and they were not to be approached or even touched by people. These pyramids may also have included staircases but they were far too steep to be climbed by the average person. During certain ceremonies or at special festivals, a priest may climb the steps of those other pyramids in order to take part in religious ceremonies as well.

The Pyramids Were a Burial Place

Although the Mayan pyramids were frequently used for religious ceremony and human sacrifice, they also were an important part of the death process as well. As we discussed, the ancient Mayan culture was very interested in the condition of the dead and they often prepared them for the journey to the underworld (or to heaven, in the case of those who were sacrificed). The pyramids also played a large part in the death rituals as well.

Some of the pyramids were the marking of a burial site of the King. The entire pyramid will be built around the burial site, but it was very rare for this to occur. In some cultures, pyramids were used for many different levels of society but in the Mayan culture, Kings were the only ones who had this privilege. There were also many who were in the royal family that may have been buried in various rooms within the pyramid as well.

Advanced Building Techniques of the Mayans

There are many theories as to the way that the Mayan pyramids were built. One of the theories has to do with the possibility that the pyramids were built with acoustics in mind. In fact, there are some pyramids that may have emitted a chirping sound, which was very similar to a sacred bird. This may even be seen today, as there are pyramids that still make such as sound that has been recorded and is currently being studied. It was theorized that a priest would stand at the bottom of the steps, clap his hands and would hear the return of the chirp of the Quetzal, which was considered to be a message from the gods.

In more recent times, robots and other forms of technology have been used to look far beyond the walls of the Mayan pyramids. In at least one case, there were burial chambers that were discovered far

below one of the pyramid temples. If it weren't for the use of technology, those chambers would have long been undiscovered.

The Mayan pyramids hold many secrets. Not only are there hidden rooms that have yet to be seen by human eyes in thousands of years, it is the sheer wonder that they were able to be built in the first place. As the pyramids continue to be studied, they are no doubt going to reveal additional secrets that will help to open our eyes to more of what the ancient Mayan Empire has to offer.

13. Where Are the Mayans Today?

One final mystery that we are going to consider is the final location of the Mayan people as a civilization. It was estimated that during the height of the Mayan Empire, there were some 8 million individuals who made up the civilization. Over the course of some 200 years, however, the large cities were abandoned and the people were scattered for reasons that remain unknown. Where are the Mayan people today?

This may come as a surprise to you, but the Mayan people still exist in the same area of the world. In fact, there are almost 7,000,000 Mayan individuals in Central America today. Out of all the indigenous groups in Peru, they are the largest, although they are still being overlooked as a people. Most people consider the downfall of the Mayan civilization to mean that all of the Mayan people perished at that time. In reality, they are still quite alive.

Some of the modern day Mayan tribes continue to adhere to many of the old standards and use the Mayan calendars, as well as keeping many of the rituals. Although they do not take place in human sacrifice and many of the other religious rituals that were seen during the ancient days, they do still try to adhere to many of the same religious practices.

As it turns out, one of the greatest mysteries of the Mayan Empire

is not a mystery at all. Although the Empire fell and the cities were abandoned, the people continued to thrive and are still living to this very day.

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About the Author

Peter Delagio is a true modern day Indiana Jones. Born and raised on the west coast of the USA, he developed an early fascination with the Native people and culture, which spread to a love of studying the world's early civilisations and forgotten empires.

He has made many extensive trips all over the planet, from Europe to the deepest jungles of the Amazon (and everywhere in-between!) to further his knowledge and uncover some of the world's most ancient of mysteries.

Fuelled by his passion for researching and learning about the secrets of these ancient civilizations, Peter's books contain all you could need to know about the people of these forgotten empires.

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